

"The Story of Roy"
by
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So, I should tell ya'll the story of how Roy got his name.

Mr. X and I had been married for eight days (we eloped, in case you're interested.) And we decided that our family should include one cat, an older animal that most wouldn't want to adopt. Ya'll know how I can be... *"Is there someone over there in the corner nobody wants? He's damaged and hurt? I'll take him! Sign me up!"*

Anyway, we went to this place in the mall in Woodland Hills, a rescue shelter that had animals they'd plucked from what tragedies we did not know. We walked around and found Cat, later to become Roy, stuck in a cage with half his hair falling out.

"Oh, he's a tough one," said the Rescue Lady. "Abused. Burned on the ears with cigarettes. Some of his teeth kicked out. Tough case, lives in this cage all the time..."

We took him. It was while Mr. X was signing the paperwork that the Sobakowa appeared quite by accident. Someone at the shelter handed me this little handful of matted multicolored fur and said, "No one will take this one. It's too ugly. All the others in its litter got adopted right away."

I didn't know what it was, but it was small and fit inside the palm of my hand. It was covered in food and it snuggled up under my hair and... it kind of *smelled*. A little. And so ya'll know, I immediately said I WILL TAKE THIS UGLY PIECE OF FUR YOU CALL A CAT. I will love it and adore it all day long.

And that is the story of Soba, who I think is the prettiest thing ever. And she is the smallest cat but still tough as nails.

We took both of our new additions home and left them to their kitty cat devices for a few hours while we shopped for toys and blankies and baskets worthy of new family members.

Soba was easy, a tiny kitten, we named her after an infomercial using the Japanese word for Buckwheat which she somewhat resembled. But Cat was harder. He'd been around, had the scars and the old-man eyes to prove it. He was incredibly skittish, hid all day, kept a wide berth around us humans and our feet. I tried different names on him but none of them fit. After a while it became a joke, then a sort-of nagging question Mr. X would ask me.

"So, what's Cat's name?" he'd ask each night when he came home.

"I don't know," I'd say. "He hasn't told me yet."

To Mr. X's credit, he did not push the issue. His crazy new wife was waiting for the cat to *tell her* his name. Excellent.

We were nearing the six-week mark and I had not named Cat. I had named the fridge, the sofa and all the neighbors ("motorcycle guy" "chuck wollery-esque man" "talky lady") and yet Cat was still Cat. *game show host*

We returned from a long weekend in Las Vegas and Cat sat perched on the stairs watching me sort laundry. Mr. X was at work and I had the day off. "Cat," I asked him.

"Tell me your name."

"Is it Luxor?"

silence.

"Grand?"

silence.

"Pirate?"

nothing.

"Sigfried?"

yawn.

"Roy?"

Hello!

And I said it again, to be sure, "Hey, you, is your name Roy?" and he perked up and trotted down from the stairs and we knew. Finally, he had told me his name.

Mr. X arrived home a few hours later. "I know his name," I said. To say I was smug would be a slight understatement. Crazy people love being vindicated, especially by nature's purest accomplice, the house pet.

"Uh. OK," he said. Probably wondering if I'd been into the cooking brandy. "So, what's his name?"

"Watch..." and I looked up at the big grey smoky lonesome of a cat sitting on the upstairs landing and I said, "Hey, Roy!"

And down he came trotting.

My husband looked at me. Looked at the cat. Shook his head and asked how I knew that was his name.

"He told me today."

So Roy and I have known each other for a long time, and we understood each other in a way nobody else could. We both had sketchy backgrounds with some unpleasant memories. We both were a little scared of people. He needed love and I had love to give. He was like me, sensitive to the smallest inflection of voice, the smallest

hurts were cause for hiding. Later, when he got sick and I had to give him medicine, I would whisper to him, tell him why, explain how much I loved him, my little old man cat.

It took a long while for him to trust me, but once he did he was my cat all the way through. He followed me from room to room, laid on me as soon as I was still, waited for me each day at the door. There was a time in my marriage when I was working later and later hours, arriving home after Mr. X. One night he told me the funniest story. He said that even before the garage door opened, before you could even hear my Jeep pulling up the street, Roy would get up and stand by the door. It was like he *just knew*. Mr. X said he'd been watching it happen for three weeks now, and finally had decided it was the weirdest thing he'd ever seen and had to tell me. *How did Roy know?* Looking back, I'm so glad he told me that one tiniest of tiny details. Roy was always there, waiting for me at the door.

Roy started sleeping on my pillow, head against mine, the day my husband moved out. He'd fill up the empty space with purring and, later, snoring. All the other cats adored Roy, he was their Hemmingway, telling them how to open doors and cast longing looks at the food bowl. He loved snuggling, especially when he was so skinny and cold all the time. He loved his tent, his self-warming cozy blanket, he loved Tuna flavored Fancy Feast and most of all he loved me.

Every morning for as long as I can recall I have scooped him up into my arms, both of us still clumsy with sleep, and I would start singing in my most awful singing voice, "Even though we ain't got money, I'm so in love with you honey..." and we danced around and that was our morning. That was how we woke up to each day.

I sang that same song to Roy yesterday, as he passed on, as he left my world as a cat (soon to inhabit it, again, I'm sure, as a President or as a Wise Man or maybe a piano player in a martini lounge) and he died, even as I sang him his song, and I miss him so terribly I can't even explain it to you, and to this day I still can't believe he told me his name.

I loved that damn cat. He was the love of my life.

He died peacefully. Roy was my number one guy, he came when I called him. He woke up with me each morning, reminding me we should freshen up the food dish. Reminding me to be hopeful because catnip could arrive unexpectedly in life. He was very wise.

*"Even though we ain't got money
I'm so in love with you honey
Every day will bring a chain of love, looo-ooove.
And in the morning when I rise
You bring a tear of joy to my eyes
And tell me everything's gonna be all right.
It's gonna be all right."*

* This is called "Danny's Song" 1971
- ^{Kenny}Loggins and ^{Jim}Messina sang this song
- Classic 1970s rock.

* Anne Murray sang this song in 1972. It became a huge hit.